

Land Development Information Series

What is Historic Preservation?

Historic preservation is the process by which buildings and structures of historical, cultural, architectural, archeological, or educational significance are preserved through the adoption of design guidelines aimed at protecting structures which would otherwise, if demolished or destroyed, would constitute an irreplaceable loss to the quality and character of the City of El Paso.

Why do we want to preserve historic buildings and structures?

The preservation of historic buildings and structures helps to maintain the character and cultural significance of El Paso and the cultural flavor of our City through the preservation of architecturally significant buildings or structures within a district.

What is a Historic Distirct?

A Historic District means an area, urban or rural, residential or commercial, defined as an “historic district” by City Council, state or federal authority and which contains within definable geographic boundaries one or more landmarks or clusters, including their accessory buildings, fences and other appurtenances, and natural resources having historical, cultural and archaeological significance, and which may have within its boundaries other buildings or structures, that, while not of such historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological significance as to be designated landmarks, nevertheless contribute to the overall visual setting of, or characteristics of the landmark or landmarks located with the district.

How do I know if my property is in a Historic District?

Historic Districts are designated by an “H” overlay on the Official Zoning Map for the City of El Paso.

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How many Historic Districts are there in El Paso?

Currently there are nine (9) Historic Districts in El Paso:

- Austin Terrace
- Chihuahuita
- Downtown
- Magoffin
- Manhattan Heights
- Mission Trail
- Old San Francisco
- Sunset Heights
- Ysleta

What is a Historic Landmark?

A Historic Landmark, also referred to as an “H” overlay property, means those buildings, objects, sites or structures of the highest historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological importance and whose demolition or destruction would constitute an irreplaceable loss to the quality and character of El Paso; certain inventoried interior spaces designed or intended to be occupied as part of the structure or which are accessible to the public; such buildings, objects, sites or structures, their appurtenances, and the property which they are located, having been so designated by City Council.

What is the Historic Landmark Commission (“HLC”)?

The Historic Landmark Commission (“HLC”) consists of nine members appointed by the Mayor and the City Representatives which have a particular interest or expertise in the field of Historic Preservation. The function of the HLC is to establish criteria to be used in determining whether certain buildings, interiors, structures, sites, districts, areas, lands and other objects should be designated as historic landmarks; Furthermore, create and recommend to city council for approval, guidelines for

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designated historic buildings, interiors accessible to the general public, structures, sites and districts to be used as general guides in determining the approval or denial of certificates of appropriateness and certificates of demolition or removal.

What is a Certificate of Appropriatness (“COA”)?

The certificate of appropriatness (COA) is a document rendered by the HLC which is required to be issued prior to the issuance of a building permit granted for the alteration, rehabilitation, construction, reconstruction or demolition of a landmark structure, landmark site or any improvement in an historic district.

What critereon is used in approving work to be done on my property?

The HLC uses the design guidelines adobted by City Council for a particular Historic Distrcit. When no guidelines have been adopted for a particular district, the guidelines from the district most similar in character, design, materials, workmanship, and time of construction shall apply. When the preceding does not provide guidelines applicable to the project, then the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings shall apply.

What type of work can I do on my property?

Interior work is acceptable as long as no structural members affecting the facades are modified. Exterior work affecting the character, design, composition, form, or appearance requires a COA from the HLC.

What do I need to submit for a COA?

When applying for a building permit for the exterior of a designated historic landmark, or a

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designated historic interior, the applicant shall submit two copies of all detailed plans, elevations, perspectives, specifications and other documents pertaining to the work to the Palnning Department. Furthermore, the COA Application shall be submitted by the appicant.

What other type of documentation is needed?

The applicant is required to submit current photographs of the subject property if none are on file, generalized site plan, and detailed site plan depending on whether the property is vacant or there are existing structures.

What is the process for obtaining a COA?

A pre-application conference is encouraged for applicants seeking a COA from the HLC. At this meeting, the applicant is informed of the requirements needed to complete the application, the proposed timeline, and the application is logged in when all documentation has been submitted. Applications for COA’s along with all supporting documentation are due in the Planning Department on the last Wednesday of every month. The regular scheduled meeting of the HLC is on the third Wednesday of every month. When the HLC agenda closes for the month, the item is placed on the agenda for the regular meeting of the HLC.

The Planning Department Staff conducts field checks and photographs cases placed on the agenda and makes a Departmental recommendation based on the design standards for each particular district.

At the HLC meeting, the case is presented by Planning Staff and dicussion is held by the HLC, along with public comment, and action is rendered based on the design guidelines for each district and the staff recommendation. Based on the action by HLC, a COA is rendered or an applicant may appeal to City Council.

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How long does this process take?

The timeline for a COA is approximately one (1) month, pending any postponement or delayed action by the HLC. All meeting notices are posted and are open to the public. Applicants or their representative(s) are strongly encouraged to appear before HLC to address any arising questions relevant to the proposed work.

What about minor work and routine maintenance?

Administrative Review will be conducted according to the Administrative Review Guidelines approved by City Council and administered by the Planning Department for the following types of work:

- Landscape materials including vegetation, irrigation, and xeriscaping, in the front, rear, side yards, and parkways;
- New fencing on the front, rear and side yards;
- Wrought iron security coverings for windows and doors;
- Exterior accessibility ramps;
- Skylights;
- Off-premise and on-premise commercial and residential signs within historic districts;
- Replacement of garage or household exterior doors that match the original doors;
- Walkways, driveways, and aprons;
- Swimming pools in the rear yard;
- Routine maintenance, including but not be limited to: painting, re-roofing, repair of walks, driveways, fences, and installation of windows similar to the original in appearance and strength of purpose, regardless of construction materials.

Administrative Review can be done in-house at the Planning Department during regular working hours: 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

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What if I do not agree with the HLC action or Staff Administrative Review?

Any applicant or the owner of any property located within three hundred feet of any landmark, or the owner of any property with the same historic district as the subject of the appeal, who is aggrieved by a ruling of the HLC concerning that landmark, may within fifteen days after the ruling of the HLC, appeal to the City Council by filing written notice of such appeal with the City Clerk. Following a public hearing to be held within sixty days of the filing of such notice of appeal, the City Council may, by a simple majority vote, uphold or overturn any ruling of the HLC.

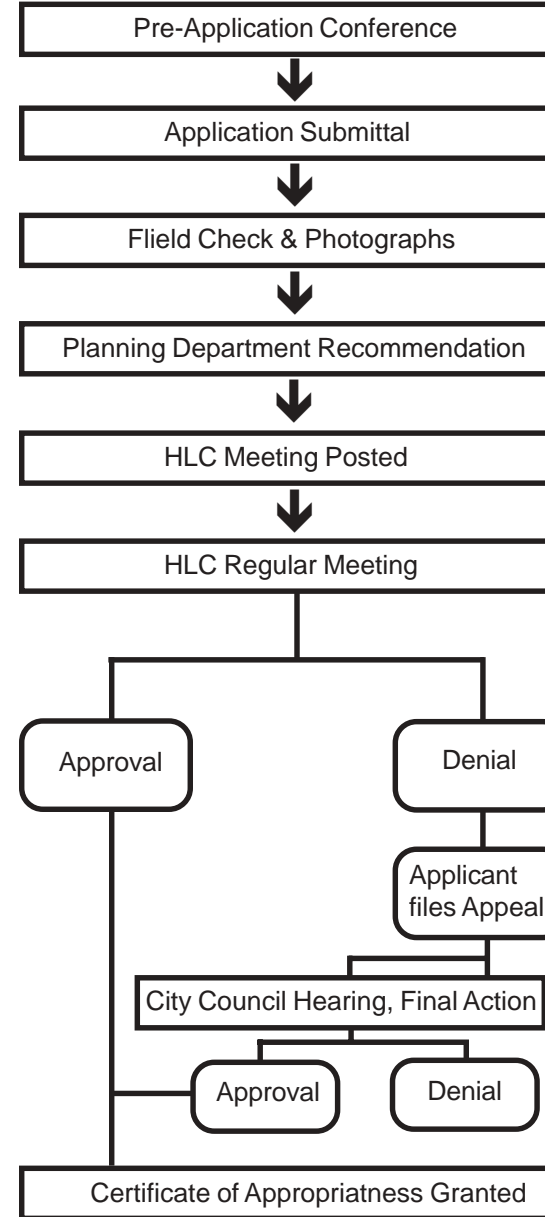
If an applicant does not agree with the Planning Staff Administrative Review, he/she may appeal to the HLC by being placed on the regular agenda for the next HLC meeting.

Where can I find out about financial assistance to renovate my historic property?

There exists various State and Federal grants that property owners can utilize through the Community Development Department - Housing Rehab Program. There are various criteria to be met and more information is available by contacting the Community Development Department at (915) 541-4346.

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Certificate of Appropriateness Process



For more information, please contact the Planning, Research & Development Department at (915) 541-4024.

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Historic Preservation Process

